

"Ghosts and remains of a well-sailed ship"

Leendart Roggeveen, Holland

Under this title, Gerard Boon published an article in the Dutch daily, *NRC Handelsblad* of 12 April, 1994. In it he tells the story of his visit to the island of Takapoto in the Tuamotu Islands, French Polynesia. It was on Takapoto that one of Roggeveen's ships, the *Africaansche Galeij*, was wrecked on a reef in May, 1722.

Boon, searching for traces of the *Africaanische Galeij*, was dropped off on Takapoto by a longboat from a coaster which had brought him the 800 kilometers from Papeete in five days. Boon found lodging with a retired schoolteacher, Madame Lea Teahu, who had been recommended as an expert on local history.

The story is quickly told. On the first of August 1721, the Dutch lawyer and notary from Holland, Jacob Roggeveen, left the roads of Texel with three ships and set off in search of the unknown *Suytlandt*, the *Terra Austratis Incognita*. After rounding Cape Horn they set a northerly course and sighted an unknown island on April 5, 1722--which they named *Paaseiland*, Easter Island.

The ships continued onward and after passing 15 degrees latitude south, their course changed in a westerly direction. At 00.30 a.m. on 19 May, 1722, the *Africaansche Galeij* signaled "land in sight"; shots were heard and light signals were seen: the *Africaansche Galeij* had run aground on a reef. Rescue operations were started by Roggeveen but the ship was lost. Captain and crew were taken aboard the two remaining ships, except for one sailor who drowned and five others who chose to remain on the island.

According to Boon, Madame Lea appeared to know nothing of this story, calling it "*extraordinaire*"; but she called her grandson and instructed him to take Mr. Boon to M. Rua Marihau, a fisherman. Rua said that, until two years ago, the barrels of two old cannon protruded from the reef at low tide at a place known as Tikaruga, on the eastern side of the island. Rua winched them out, hoping to sell them as antiques but the Mayor, Napoleon Spitz, confiscated the treasure on the basis of a French antiquities law.

Boon was guided to the Takapotan public works yard where the cannon lay, one almost in pieces. The other, unmistakably a cannon, is 2 meters in length and 40 centimeters in diameter. Rua hacked off a piece and gave it to the writer: "a souvenir".

The article ends with more details of the shipwreck adding that, according to another fisherman, Tahiri Toofa, it is still possible to see the remains of the *Africaansche Galeij* (as "dark spots") in calm weather just behind the breakers at Tikaruga, at a depth of some 50 meters.

This intriguing story reminded me of Robert Langdon's books concerning the "Lost Caravel" and Langdon mentions the wreck of the *Africaansche Galeij* on Takapoto. Boon, however, seems unaware of the arrival of Commodore John Bryon in 1765. Bryon, under orders from the British

Admiralty, sailed with HMS *Dolphin* and *Tamar* on a voyage during which he rediscovered and annexed the Falklands and circumnavigated the globe in less than 2 years. In June of 1765 he went ashore on the atoll of Takaroa and found the carved head of a Dutch longboat's rudder, which was very old and worm-eaten. He also saw a piece of hammered iron, some brass, and some iron tools. Bryon had not heard of the wreck of the *Africaansche Galeij* on neighboring Takapoto for he thought the islanders' ancestors must have gotten these items by "cutting off one of those Dutch ships who attempted to make discoveries this way many years ago and who were never afterwards heard of." Bryon sailed over to Takapoto but did not land. He did, however, notice two or three large boats in Takapoto's lagoon, one of which had two masts and some rigging.

A puzzling item in Boon's narrative is the mention of Captain Roosendaal, captain of the *Africaansche Galeij*, throwing overboard his cannon in order to lighten ship when he ran aground. This is not mentioned by Roggeveen in his log, nor is it mentioned in the log of the ship *Thienhoven*.

But let us return to those five men who choose to stay behind. Both the logs of Roggeveen and Bouman mention the deserters. In Roggeveen's account, he deplores the loss of victuals aboard the ship. It happened so quickly that "...the people were in a position to save food and spirits only for a few days, which spirits were probably also the reason that two sailors of the ship *Den Arend* and three of the *Thienhoven* decided to remain there; for when the last vessel was leaving the shore, these brainless fellows appeared, shouting 'We wish you a successful voyage, say goodnight to our friends in Amsterdam, we shall stay here.' Furthermore the Chief Carpenter of the *Galeij* and two or three more of the people say that these crazy deserters asked them also to stay there, which decision is the more incomprehensible because it cannot be unknown to them that this place is devoid of all shipping for returning to their Fatherland at some time (when they recover their wits). Also it is known to them that the island is inhabited, and being driven by drunkenness or wanton lust to have bodily intercourse with the women of the Indians, they will surely be killed."

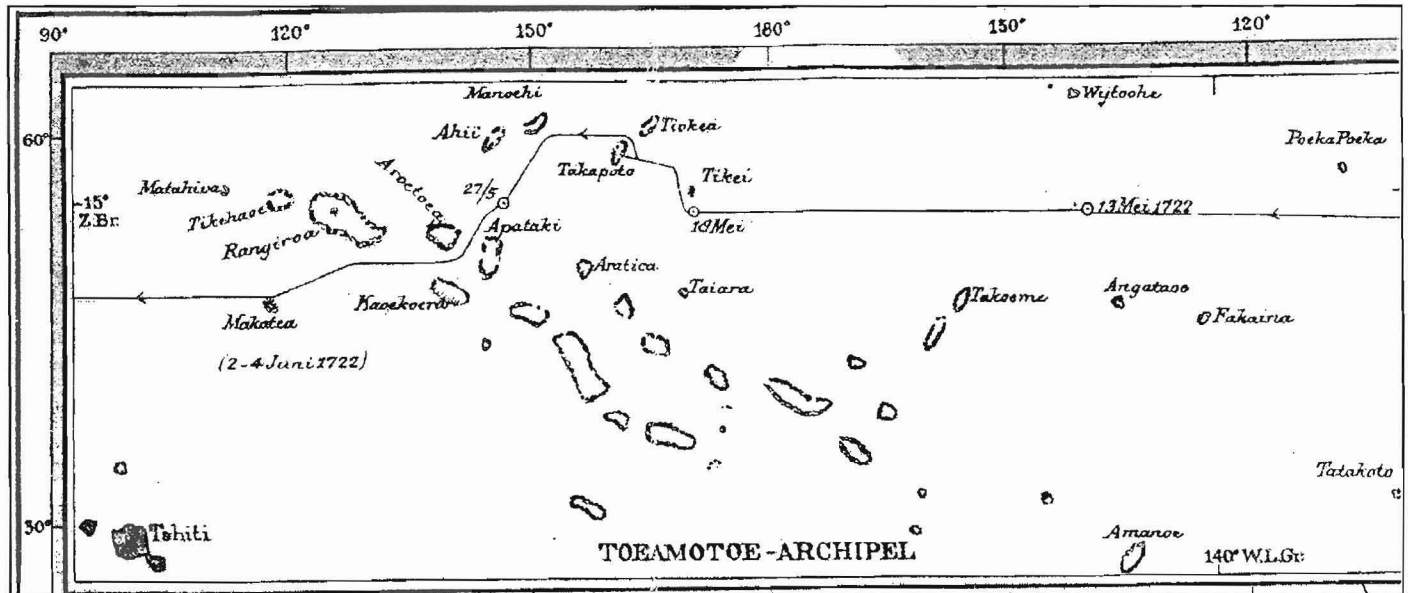
Bouman, describing what he and his men had done in order to save as much as possible from the *Galeij* tells us that "...when they were about to set off from the beach, his quartermaster, two of his own sailors and two from the *Arend* refused to enter the boats, saying that they planned to stay on the island, wishing us and the ships all the best, after which they moved into the woods hastily and though they were recalled did not wish to listen...."

A footnote on this subject has been kindly supplied by Herbert von Saher: Gerard Boon is an anthropologist, working free-lance as a writer for newspapers and scientific periodicals, TV and radio programs. He is writing a book on

the search for "southland" and is making a film about the *African Galley* and Takapoto. Von Saher, in checking the journals of Roggeveen and Bouman found that the five men who stayed behind on the island were sent out in sloops by Roggeveen to try to rescue material from the wreck. And, when Commodore Bryon visited these islands 43 years later, he was surprised to find on the beach an old white man with a long grey beard who spoke and sung in an "unintelligible" language.

References

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Route of Jacob Roggeveen's ships through the Tuamotus. Archief van het Zeeuwisch Genootschp, 1911



As mentioned in an earlier issue (RNJ 8(1):23), a modern A-frame house has been built on an ancient ahu located next to the Englert Museum and clearly visible from it. The house sits on the terrace next to a moai; the back wall of the ahu can be seen in the foreground of the photo. Because the site is on private land, nothing can be done about it.

Photo by William Liller.